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**The American Jewish Committee** Kenneth Bandler, Director, Public Relations and Communications  
165 E. 56 Street, New York, NY 10022 • (212) 751-4000 • Fax (212) 319-6156 e-mail: [pr@ajc.org](mailto:pr@ajc.org) • [www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org)

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## **Raoul Wallenberg: No End to the Mystery**

February 13, 2002 - NEW YORK -- The American Jewish Committee today released its second report on the shadowy fate of Raoul Wallenberg, who saved as many as 100,000 Hungarian Jews from the Nazis.

The report was released at a luncheon on Capitol Hill marking the 20th anniversary of the designation of Raoul Wallenberg as an Honorary Citizen of the United States. AJC and Congressman Tom Lantos hosted the event.

On January 17, 1945, Mr. Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat stationed in Budapest but working for the U.S. War Refugee Board, was arrested by the Soviet military and disappeared into the Gulag. Reports he was a spy, is dead, alive, in prison, in hospital - all have formed part of the saga in the intervening decades.

*The Last Word on Wallenberg? New Investigations, New Questions*, by historian William Korey, examines five different, and sometimes conflicting, reports unveiled last year in Stockholm by a Swedish-Russian Working Group and three independent consultants.

"Despite the solemnity of the January 12 [2001] event and the outpouring of emotional apologies, the decade-long inquiry had produced no conclusive result about the fate of the greatest savior of Jewish life during the Holocaust and, thus, no closure for the profound trauma afflicting the conscience of the world," writes Dr. Korey. He was also the author of the 2000 AJC study *The Wallenberg Mystery: Fifty-five Years Later*.

The full report can be found at on the [AJC website](http://www.ajc.org).

It analyzes the work of the Swedish-Russian Working Group, as well as reports by independent consultants Susan Ellen Mesinai, Professor Marvin W. Makinen and Susanne Berger. There are in fact five reports because, writes Dr. Korey, "after ten years of supposedly collaborative collegial inquiry, the Swedes and the Russians issued two separate, contradictory, and wholly unbridgeable reports."

Although the independent consultants all concluded more investigation should be done and more direct access to documents granted, the official press release issued by the Russian working group said its work is finished.

From the reports, it appears Mr. Wallenberg "was abandoned diplomatically by both his American and his Swedish sponsors and allowed to languish in the Russian prison system," writes AJC executive director David Harris in the foreword to Dr. Korey's report. "But the memory of his heroism was kept alive by those he had snatched from the Nazi death apparatus."

Foremost among those are California Congressman Tom Lantos and his wife, Annette, who, themselves

rescued by Mr. Wallenberg, have struggled for over 20 years to rescue the truth about him.

"Raoul Wallenberg was a member of Sweden's most distinguished, powerful, and wealthy family," writes Congressman Lantos in the preface to the report. "But he voluntarily left the security, comfort, and affluence of peaceful Stockholm to go to the hell of Budapest. With courage that defies description, he placed his own frail, unarmed body between the Nazi war machine and its intended innocent victims."

In 1979, joined by AJC, Ms. Lantos founded a Free Wallenberg Committee. In 1981, actively supported by AJC, Congressman Lantos sponsored legislation conferring honorary U.S. citizenship on Mr. Wallenberg. This rare honor had a very practical side, writes the congressman: "by making him an honorary citizen, the U.S. government had greater legitimacy and justification for raising his case with Soviet officials."

That has been an uphill battle, even though Mr. Wallenberg's profile is higher in the U.S. than anywhere in the world, writes Dr. Korey. For example, in January 2000, then AJC-president Bruce Ramer wrote President Clinton asking him to push the Russians for the full Wallenberg story. The reply, from the state department's reigning Russia specialist, read in part, "Let me assure you that Mr. Wallenberg's case will remain a U.S. foreign policy priority until the facts are finally unearthed."

However, as Dr. Korey points out, "The tired, hackneyed, euphemistic language and the transparently inaccurate and self-serving characterization of America's disgraceful record drained away credibility. Surely, gaining Wallenberg's release --or simply ascertaining the truth about his fate - had hardly been a priority of U.S. foreign policy since April 1945."

In 1973, Dr. Korey continues, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, busy crafting detente, "disapproved" a proposal that the U.S. formally ask the Soviets to account for Mr. Wallenberg. The request for such an accounting had come from the Swedish diplomat's "aged and ailing" mother.

Still, the real villains of the five reports are various self-interested Swedish officials, but, above all, duplicitous Russians. The 34-page Russian report continued to stand by the "canonical" Russian belief, dating from 1957, that Mr. Wallenberg died in Lubyanka prison in July 17, 1947, even though the memo behind this has "turned out to be one of the greatest hoaxes of the twentieth century," states Dr. Korey.

The Russian report is unclear as to whether Mr. Wallenberg died of illness, poor prison conditions or was shot (and, if shot, by whom). "If Moscow is inclined now to accept the thesis that Wallenberg was executed by shooting, it offers no proof nor documentation for this view," Dr. Korey states.

The Swedish report - over ten times as long - "concluded that the evidence was incomplete and uncertain," writes Dr. Korey. Its "historically significant" apology from Sweden's prime minister, Göran Persson, that "'since there is no unequivocal evidence of what happened to Wallenberg, it cannot be said that Raoul Wallenberg is dead'," marks the first time a public authority "ventured so close to explicitly stating the possibility that Wallenberg might still be alive."

Theories and plots abound in Dr. Korey's analysis. But he reserves his deepest scorn for Staffan Soederblom, Sweden's ambassador to Moscow in the 1940s, who significantly helped doom Mr. Wallenberg simply by not understanding that the Soviets may have wanted to exchange him for Soviet defectors.

"What a monumental tragedy!" writes Dr. Korey. "How Kafkaesque as well! Arguably the most

important diplomat in the Swedish Foreign Ministry handling the Wallenberg case was a blundering fool, and possibly a psychologically damaged one to boot, incapable of appropriate action at the time when the survival of Sweden's greatest moral figure of the Holocaust was at stake."

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